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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: SECRETARY RICE'S STATEMENT ON TAIWAN'S UN
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¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused December 22-26 news coverage on Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's criticism of Taiwan's referendum on a bid to enter the UN under the name of "Taiwan" as "provocative," and President Chen Shui-bian's response. Meanwhile, where the mausoleums of Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo should be moved to also attracted much media attention as it may become another campaign issue for the upcoming elections.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" urged the U.S. to pay more attention to China's moves aimed at changing the status quo. The pro-independence, English-language daily "Taiwan News" questioned in an editorial U.S. support for Taiwan's democracy. A commentary in the pro-independence, English-language daily "Taipei Times" said the UN referendum can be a bargaining chip for Taiwan. The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" editorialized that the U.S. has been ignoring the changes in Taiwan public opinion as its self-identity grows. Another commentary in "China Times" speculated that the U.S. is holding bargaining chips to compel Chen Shui-bian to submit [to U.S. pressure]. The conservative, pro-unification, English-language daily "China Post" said in an editorial that both the Taiwan representative in Washington and the U.S. representative in Taipei should go home because they failed to accomplish their missions regarding the UN referendum. End Summary.

A) "How can the U.S. Be Indifferent to China's 'Changing the Status Quo' across the Taiwan Strait"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation 720,000] editorialized (12/25):

"... The U.S. is concerned about the referendum on Taiwan's bid to enter the UN because of worries that the cross-Strait status quo would be disrupted. There is agreement about this between the U.S. and Taiwan. However, we believe the U.S. has made a mistake over the object of its concern. It is not Taiwan but China, which has constantly kept changing the status quo. One of the moves is the...new air route only 4.2 nautical miles away from the center line of the Taiwan Strait. This is constraining Taiwan's national defense depth. In order to maintain the status quo, shouldn't the U.S. express its concern [over this] more actively? The purpose of the 'Taiwan Relations Act' is to 'help maintain the peace, security, and stability of the West Pacific.' As the U.S. is concerned about the 'four-noes,' should it in fact be more concerned about the premise: 'as long as China does not intend to use force against Taiwan'?"

B) "U.S. Must Respect Strategic Value of Taiwan Democracy"

The pro-independence, English-language daily "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (12/25):

"... Regretfully, Rice repeated Washington's misunderstanding that the referendum on whether to join the UN under the name of 'Taiwan' is a government 'policy' and ignores the fact that the initiative is being put on the ballot together with the presidential election on March 22 because of signatures of 2.72 million Taiwan citizens and not because of a decision by President Chen Shui-bian.

"... Indeed, Rice's statement confirms suspicions that Washington does not actually take the promotion or the consolidation of democracy as a serious foreign policy priority. Apparently for the sake of Bush's illegal war in Iraq and misguided 'war on terrorism,' Washington has now willingly transformed itself from being the world's most important advocate of democracy and freedom into a parrot of the PRC's Taiwan Affairs Office.

"... The U.S. may indeed need greater cooperation from the PRC, but Washington should not naively ignore the very real possibility that the PRC is using its growing economic, military and diplomatic clout to revamp the world community in its own authoritarian image and turning the Bush administration into a tool for the consolidation of PRC neo-authoritarian dominance in Asia. We urge rational voices in the U.S. government and Congress and other informed opinion leaders to carefully consider the long-term interests of the democratic camp in Asia and the world and cease further actions to 'contain' Taiwan democracy before it is too late."

C) "Let's Deal with Our Own Problems"

Professor Lee Hsiao-feng, Graduate School of Taiwan Culture, National Taipei University of Education, wrote in the pro-independence, English-language daily "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (12/24):

"... The US has the same problem. Though they claim not to support Taiwanese independence, they cannot avoid intervention if China
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invades Taiwan. This is why the US does not want Taiwan to 'make trouble.' What Washington really means is that Taiwan should not make trouble for the US.

"Should we try to lighten the burden on the US and China by leaving Taiwan in a situation where it is continually oppressed or should we manage our own plight, leaving the US and China to deal with their own problems?

"The answer is the latter, and the referendum is a great solution: It expresses the desire of the Taiwanese for formal independence, but does not immediately sink China and the US into an extremely problematic situation.

"... They would, though, have to ask: 'What's next?'

"And when they start asking us for the next move, it indicates that we are no longer in the passive position of being oppressed. Hence the referendum also functions as a bargaining chip, allowing us to secure our ground and advance as we choose. ..."

D) "After the 'Provocative' Disturbance, Will the U.S.-Taiwan Rift Become Even Wider?"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (12/26):

"Four or five years ago, if one said the U.S. would strongly criticize Taiwan again and again, probably neither the U.S. nor Taiwan would believe it. Yet today the U.S. has been stepping up its criticism against Taiwan, and the rank of the official leveling the criticism is getting higher. But Taiwan seems to be getting used to it and has repeatedly talked back. If this continues, will U.S.-Taiwan relations see some fundamental changes?

"... The U.S. government does not pay attention to public opinion in Taiwan at ordinary times. It underestimates the political effects resulting from the growth of Taiwan's self-identity and lacks a forward-looking cross-Straits policy. It only resolves immediate problems. When problems appear, it often asks Taiwan to compromise and make concessions. When things calm down, it presumes there is

no longer any problem. The Taiwan people therefore feel betrayed by the U.S. and have less good feeling for and trust in the U.S.

"... How can the U.S., which has been Taiwan's largest support and encouragement, from maintaining its security to its freedom and democracy, explain to Taiwan that it can only proceed with its democratization to a certain extent and cannot have the same status and dignity as other countries? For the people of Taiwan this is unacceptable discrimination and hypocrisy. The reason for the Taiwan people's disappointment and dissatisfaction comes from not only the event of the referendum, but the fact that Taiwan's national development and interest are now in conflict with those of the U.S.

"However, the U.S. seems to care little about this more fundamental and far-reaching issue. Therefore, even if the referendum disturbance passes without any complications, U.S.-Taiwan relations will continue to face undercurrents. Compared to places like the Middle East, there is, in fact, more room for flexibility in designing a new cross-Straits policy. However, if the U.S. cannot think of a new cross-Straits policy with a future perspective and only tries to delay a resolution as long as possible by following the old thinking, then there will continue to be one sharp disturbance after another in the U.S.-China-Taiwan relationship."

E) "Does the U.S. Have Bargaining Chips to Force Chen Shui-bian to Submit?"

Professor Edward I-hsin Chen, Graduate Institute of American Studies, Tamkang University, commented in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (12/24):

"... The bargaining chips of the U.S. include Chen Shui-bian's family's accounts in U.S. banks, his private promises to the U.S., (which may be unfavorable for his becoming the head of the Green camp), and the U.S. commitment and arrangements for Chen after he leaves office. However, the U.S. will show the cards one by one rather than all at once to force Chen Shui-bian to submit. This step-by-step approach is clearly reflected in remarks made by AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt during his visit in Taiwan. In addition, one can also see signs that the U.S. is pressuring Bian in the statements made by Central Election Committee officials on the one-step or two-step voting format.

"... If the Blue and the Green camps can reach a compromise regarding the one or two-step dispute and Ma Ying-jeou and Frank Hsieh can walk out of the shadow of lawsuits against them and
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concentrate on campaigning, these will be proof that the U.S. does have the bargaining chips to interfere in an election in Taiwan that may have been unfair in the first place [i.e., unfair until the U.S. allegedly used its bargaining chips to interfere]."

F) "Wu, Young Should Go Home"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language daily "The China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (12/25):

"President Chen Shui-bian has hit back at U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's criticism of his plan to hold a referendum on joining the United Nations as Taiwan as being 'provocative.'

"The president's unprecedented rebuke of the U.S. secretary of state will further strain relations between Taipei and its mentor and protector, the U.S.

"... Rice is the highest-level U.S. official to have warned Taipei against holding the referendum alongside the presidential elections on March 22. Since August, Washington has repeatedly cautioned Chen against his plan to stage the vote in conjunction with presidential polls.

"Joseph Wu and Stephen Young should go home for missions unaccomplished."

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